

**Opening Statement**  
**Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)**  
**Joint hearing of the Oversight Subcommittees on Transportation and Public Assets and**  
**Government Operations: “Examining the Safety and Service of D.C. Metro”**  
**April 13, 2016**

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this opportunity to revisit the safety and service challenges faced by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, or Metro. I have spent the past 21 years working on Metro related issues. First as a member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, I made appointments to the Metro Board, rezoned property around Metro stations to maximize their potential, approved the local operating subsidy, and helped create the local tax districts to fund construction of the new Silver Line. Now in Congress, I have helped secure the \$150 million annual federal commitment for safety improvements -- which is matched by Virginia, Maryland, and D.C., helped secure federal financing for the Silver Line, and helped provide robust oversight through our work on this Committee. So no one is more disappointed or disheartened than I am with the unacceptable and unsustainable state of affairs at Metro

We held two hearings last year on Metro safety in the wake of the tragic January 12, 2015, incident on the Yellow Line at L’Enfant Plaza. **The horribly mismanaged response to a cable fire, caused by electrical arcing in a tunnel, allowed train cars to fill with toxic smoke leading to the death of one passenger and injuries for dozens of others. In the wake of that tragedy, I said Metro was facing multiple crises – a crisis in management and leadership, a crisis in safety, a crisis in commuter and stakeholder confidence, and a crisis in funding.** I want to touch on some of the new developments since our last hearing as we assess Metro’s progress in tackling these competing challenges.

***Crisis in leadership***

Let me start with the most significant improvement, which is the November hiring of General Manager Paul Wiedefeld, who is with us today. **His hiring was long overdue as Metro went 10 months without a general manager because of disagreement among board members about the type of leadership that was needed. I think most observers agree he is proving to be the right leader at the right time to help get Metro back on the right track.** He comes to Metro with experience in both the transit and aviation industries, and he spent his early days meeting with Metro’s many regional stakeholders and conducting his own internal assessment of how bad things have become. I rode the Orange Line through my district with Mr. Wiedefeld in January so he could hear firsthand from riders about their safety and reliability concerns. As if to underscore rider frustration, we encountered two cracked rails due to the extremely cold temperatures, which of course delayed trains. In his short time on the job, he’s built a reputation as a straight shooter and a hands-on manager. But he has a monumental task ahead.

Mr. Wiedefeld recently issued a Customer Accountability Report in which he lays out the hard truths about safety, reliability, and basic customer service coupled with more than 50 actions he and the agency will begin taking to address them. Of course, that is in addition to the urgent safety recommendations -- dealing with tunnel ventilation, response procedures, and protective sleeves on power cables -- made by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) as part of its ongoing investigation into the L’Enfant Plaza incident. In addition the Federal

Transit Administration (FTA), which conducted its own safety management inspection and has now assumed safety oversight for Metro, has issued 91 corrective actions.

### *Crisis in safety*

I know the general manager agrees that safety is his and Metro's chief priority. Since our last hearing, two additional incidents have rattled riders and further eroded confidence. First, a train derailed in the early morning hours of August 6 on the Orange/Blue/Silver Lines between the Federal Triangle and Smithsonian stations, near the heart of the system. The train, which was not carrying passengers yet, derailed due to a defect in the rail line, a wide gap that had been previously detected but was misreported and went unfixed. That section of the system had to be shut down for nine hours to allow for cleanup and repairs. Had the defect been properly reported, it would have triggered that section of track being taken out of service for immediate repairs. In February, FTA inspectors discovered another section of track between Metro Center and Federal Triangle with a similar gap in the rail line that could have created a derailment.

Then Metro suffered a gut punch on March 14 with another electrical arcing incident, this time on the Orange/Blue/Silver Lines at McPherson Square. Thankfully this incident also occurred early in the morning before the system opened, but it is particularly troubling as it again involved wire and jumper cables where it appears the protective sleeves had worn away or had not been installed properly. In a staff briefing prior to this hearing, the NTSB said the large flash created by the arcing could have been mistaken for an explosion by riders and sparked panic on the platform had it happened during normal service hours. It was a disturbing safety shortfall that should have been identified and fixed immediately following the tragedy at L'Enfant.

It would seem Mr. Wiedefeld shared that assessment, prompting him to take the unprecedented step of closing the entire Metro system for a 24-hour period to allow for an emergency inspection of all cables. Inspectors identified 27 locations that required immediate repairs and three so-called "show stoppers," where the protective sleeves were so gnarled that they would have triggered a stop in service through those locations if they had been discovered by routine inspection. I understand that following the L'Enfant Plaza incident Metro inspected and photographed all 6,400 cable connectors throughout the system and has been systematically working to replace the 80% it believes were improperly installed, but that work is only about halfway complete.

### *Crisis in confidence*

Though it created a significant challenge for the region's commuters and the federal government, which encouraged employees to use unscheduled leave and telework for the day, **I support the general manager's decision on the one-day closure – although I caution against prolonged closures in the future.** It served as an overdue shot across the bow to the entire workforce at Metro that a culture of mediocrity is no longer acceptable. What's been particularly frustrating with each of the safety investigations is the revelation that Metro does, in fact, appear to have good policies and procedures in place, but they're just not being followed, something I know Mr. Wiedefeld aims to rectify.

**In addition, shuttering the system serves as a welcome message to riders that someone is finally taking their safety seriously and demanding accountability within Metro.**

As part of his internal assessment of Metro, I have encouraged Mr. Wiedefeld to make significant personnel changes at the highest levels of management, and I am pleased by yesterday's announcement about the hiring of a new chief safety officer. Further, those responsible for allowing these issues to languish should step down or be removed.

Given all this, it should be no surprise that Metro ridership has declined by 6% during weekdays and 12% on weekends, when most track work is taking place, as riders seek out more reliable commuting alternatives. In response, Metro hired a consultant to conduct a top-to-bottom review of its operations. The McKinsey & Company report offers a blueprint for both strategic short-term fixes that could be applied immediately, along with more long-term recommendations to address "the customer needs of reliability, information, safety, and comfort."

To his credit, Mr. Wiedefeld is already starting to take such actions. For example, he is instituting a grace period for riders so that if they discover trains are delayed after passing the fare gate, they can quickly exit without being charged. He also has made himself more accessible to riders and is pushing the workforce to do so as well, including providing station managers with more visible uniforms so riders know who to approach when they have questions or problems. Although small gestures, they are part of new approach the general manager wants riders to expect from Metro.

### *Crisis in funding*

**Mr. Chairman, watching Metro reel from one crisis to the next further underscores the risks of failing to maintain and modernize our nation's core infrastructure. The FTA estimates the national backlog to be \$86 billion to bring our nation's transit agencies up to a state of good repair with the seven oldest systems, including Metro, accounting for two-thirds of that backlog. The NTSB, the FTA, and now the general manager have identified a list of priority safety improvements that must be made, but Metro needs the financial support to ensure these fixes get made.** As my colleagues know, the federal government already is a strong partner with representation on the Metro board and the annual capital funding commitment with our state and local partners. The one-day shutdown was just the latest reminder of how much the federal government depends on Metro. Federal employees count for more than 40% of riders and more than one-third of Metro's stations are on federal property. In addition, millions of our constituents visit the nation's capital every year and rely on Metro to get around.

I understand Metro Board Chair Jack Evans has suggested the federal government make further contributions, including dollars for operating costs, as part of a regional effort to restore Metro to the world class system it once was. **In my role as Chairman of the Fairfax Board of Supervisors in 2004, I helped launch the blue ribbon panel on Metro funding that ultimately recommended a regional sales tax and called on the federal government to "participate significantly in addressing the projected shortfall for capital maintenance and system enhancement, since Metro service is a critical service for effective federal operations."** And in testimony before this Committee in 2005, the Government Accountability Office noted that, "as far back as 1979, we reported on the need for a revenue source dedicated to pay the costs of mass transportation in the Washington region." I agree that is a discussion in which the federal government must be engaged as we move forward, but our immediate attention has to be focused on restoring safety and getting Metro's house in order.

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